



PRESS NOTICE

BILL NETTLES UNITED STATES ATTORNEY DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

*1441 Main Street, Suite 500 * Columbia, SC 29201 * (803) 929-3000*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT PERSON: Nick Bianchi
(843) 727-4381

FORMER STATE TROOPER ADMITS TO ROLE IN MARIJUANA OPERATION

Columbia, South Carolina ---- United States Attorney Bill Nettles stated today that Kurt Steffen, age 30, of Summerville, South Carolina, pled guilty today in federal court in Charleston to manufacturing and possessing with intent to distribute 100 or more marijuana plants, a violation of Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1). Senior United States District Judge C. Weston Houck accepted the guilty plea and will impose a sentence after he has reviewed the presentence report which will be prepared by the U.S. Probation Office.

Evidence presented at the change of plea hearing established that Steffen was part of a large scale indoor marijuana growing operation while employed as a state trooper with the South Carolina Highway Patrol. Steffen was hired by the South Carolina Highway Patrol in May 2007 and graduated from the South Carolina Police Academy in November 2007. Some time thereafter, Steffen, along with others,

decided to begin a large scale marijuana growing operation in order to make more money. Steffen purchased 300 Stable Lane, a five-acre tract of land in Ridgeville, SC, in May 2008, which would serve as the location for the marijuana grow.

Prior to the grow being discovered by the Dorchester County Metro Narcotics Unit in January 2010, the operation yielded multiple harvests of marijuana for Steffen and his co-defendants, resulting in thousands of dollars worth of profit for the group. When deputies executed a search warrant on the property in January 2010, they found thousands of dollars worth of equipment and over 300 marijuana plants spread throughout three different structures on the property.

During his change of plea hearing, Steffen specifically admitted to transporting marijuana in his South Carolina Highway Patrol vehicle. He also agreed to forfeit his interest in 300 Stable Lane to the federal government.

Mr. Nettles stated that Steffen is facing 5-40 years imprisonment and/or a fine of \$5,000,000, to be followed by a minimum of 4 years supervised release. Mr. Nettles stated that the case was investigated by agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Dorchester County Sheriff's Office, and the Summerville Police Department, and Assistant United States Attorney Nick Bianchi of the Charleston office handled the case.

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